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Climate change and nature, integration of spatial policies with a land use model

Michiel van Eupen¹ Sabine van Rooji¹ Eveline Steingröver¹ and Eric Koomen²

¹Alterra Wageningen UR, Wageningen, the Netherlands, ²VU University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Objective of this research is to model the impact of climate change and land use pressures on the spatial configuration of nature areas, related to a series of climatic and policy scenarios. The results of the study can be used to evaluate current nature conservation policies and will be useful to future optimising and implementation of nature areas related to climate change. Future land use is an important topic in studies related to planning and evaluation of spatial strategies. Land-use models are a well known instrument to inform spatial planners of the possible future land-use configurations, describing changes in the area of land use types related to such spatial strategies. The current available land-use change models are based on the determination and quantification of the main drivers of land use change. Results of this analysis are integrated into mathematical allocation mechanisms which redistribute the predefined areas per land-use-class based on location specific potentials.

This approach, in which socio-economic and biophysical factors are driving the rate and location of land use change, is limited applicable to the current procedure of nature planning. In the Netherlands the sometimes purely political decision for the designation of nature areas cannot be combined with the approach used for modelling the other land use classes (e.g. change within agriculture or urbanisation). As a consequence the current land use models are failing when focussing on planning of nature. In the land-use scanner this is solved by predefining and allocating a fixed area for nature, prior to the allocation of all other land use classes. However, this is disturbing the principle of a dynamic land use model, which should be able to integrate all social, economic and spatial drivers involved. In our new approach, nature is integrated more stepwise and iterative into the land use model. First climatically and site conditions are used to calculate the probable distribution of nature types. This is done with current available state of the art models calculating effect of (the change in) site conditions (e.g. groundwater and precipitation) on nature. These potentials for nature types are the basis for further allocation and can be combined with strategies to keep or remove current designated areas.

Second step is the iterative integration with other land-use classes with probably competing claims at the same locations. Based on economical or social factors of importance, reallocation of nature areas could be considered. This decision can be made based on mathematical thresholds (e.g. maximum applicable economical cost for nature) or just based on expert judgement. Reallocation of nature can be based on the results from the first step. The new approach was applied in a Dutch case study, focussing on the climatically robustness of the Dutch Ecological main structure related to current known land-use pressures in the Netherlands up to 2040. We conclude that the new stepwise application of nature in the land-use scanner produces new and potentially useful information for policy makers, although the involved models and especially their climate knowledge are still under development.